

Message Text

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62

ACTION NODS-00

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O 141734Z SEP 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9558

S E C R E T SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6154

NODIS

FOR SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, LE, SY, US

SUBJECT: LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS

REF: STATE 225449

1. SUMMARY: ASAD'S UNDERSTANDING OF ATTITUDES OF LEBANESE CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CLOSELY PARALLELS THAT OF USG. CONCERNING HIS OWN PLANS, PRESIDENT STATED HE WOULD CONTINUE HIS INTENSIVE SERIES OF POLITICAL CONTACTS BUT COULD NOT YET PREDICT THEIR OUTCOME. BELIEVES THERE GROWING SUPPORT FOR SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON. DENIED ANY SYRIAN PLAN FOR MILITARY VICTORY IN LEBANON AND CRITICIZED ACTIONS OF BOTH THE PENINSULA STATES AND EGYPT VIS-A-VIS LEBANON. HE WILL THINK OVER PROVIDING US WITH HIS SUGGESTIONS ABOUT POSITIONS WE MIGHT ADOPT IN ANY PUBLIC STATEMENT AND PURSUE IN OUR GENERAL DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES. END SUMMARY

2. MET WITH ASAD FOR ONE HOUR AFTERNOON SEPTEMBER 14 TO DISCUSS CURRENT LEBANESE DEVELOPMENTS. AFTER MAKING TALKING POINTS REFTEL REGARDING THE HOUGHTON/MACK VISIT, I ASKED ASAD IF OUR INFORMATION ABOUT THE ATTITUDES OF CHRISTIAN LEADERSHIP CORRESPONDED WITH HIS OWN. HE REPLIED THAT SEVERAL OF THE ISSUES WHICH THE CHRISTIANS HAD DISCUSSED WITH US HAD NEVER BEEN RAISED BY THEM WITH THE SYRIANS. SPECIFICALLY, THEY HAD NOT DISCUSSED CANTONALIZATION OF

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LEBANON NOR HAD CHAMOUN SPOKEN OF EXPELLING FROM LEBANON

THOSE PALESTINIANS WHO ARRIVED IN THE COUNTRY AFTER 1969. NONETHELESS, SYRIA'S UNDERSTANDING OF THE CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES CLOSELY PARALLELED OUR REPORT WHICH HE APPRECIATED RECEIVING. THE SYRIANS RECOGNIZED THAT THERE WAS AN UNDERCURRENT OF FEAR, OR AT LEAST OF APPREHENSION, IN CHRISTIAN ATTITUDES ABOUT THEIR FUTURE POSITION IN LEBANON.

3. I SAID WE IN TURN WOULD WELCOME ASAD'S OWN ASSESSMENT OF THE CURRENT SITUATION AND ANY INDICATIONS HE MIGHT WISH TO SHARE ABOUT HIS OWN PLANS. HE BEGAN HESITANTLY. NOTED THAT HE WAS CONTINUING AN INTENSIVE SERIES OF POLITICAL CONTACTS WITH VARIOUS LEBANESE LEADERS AS WELL AS WITH REPRESENTATIVES OF MANY OF THE ARAB STATES CONCERNED WITH THE LEBANON. "IT IS IMPOSSIBLE JUST NOW TO PREDICT WITH ANY CERTAINTY THE RESULTS OF THESE CONTACTS ALTHOUGH ONE MUST BE OPTIMISTIC. ALMOST ALL THE PARTIES ARE GOOD TALKERS WHO SAY THE RIGHT THINGS ABOUT ENDING THE FIGHTING AND HOW EAGER THEY ARE TO WORK WITH US TOWARDS THIS END. WE HAVE TO CONTINUE OUR EFFORTS AND WE WILL DO SO."

4. WARMING UP A BIT, ASAD VOLUNTEERED THAT, CONTRARY TO MANY RUMORS, SYRIA IS MAKING NO REDEPLOYMENT OF ITS TROOPS IN LEBANON. "WE DO NOT INTEND TO OCCUPY BEIRUT AND WE HAVE NO PLANS FOR A MILITARY VICTORY." WHERE SYRIAN MILITARY UNITS ARE PRESENT, SECURITY PREVAILS. SAID HE HAS TOLD SARKIS AND REITERATED THE SAME MESSAGE TO ALL HIS OTHER LEBANESE VISITORS THAT ANY TIME THEY FEEL THEY NO LONGER WISH SYRIAN HELP "WE ARE READY TO WITHDRAW; OF COURSE, OUR POSITION IS THAT ANY SUCH REQUEST MUST COME FROM A LEGITIMATE AUTHORITY." THE PRESIDENT THEN PAUSED AND STATED THAT FOREGOING SUMMED UP HIS OVERVIEW OF THE CURRENT STATE OF PLAY.

5. I COMMENTED THAT COMPARED TO ONE OR TWO MONTHS AGO, THERE SEEMED TO BE A LARGER AND STILL GROWING CONSENSUS IN MOST LEBANESE POLITICAL CIRCLES, AND TO AN EXTENT WITHIN PALESTINIAN CIRCLES AS WELL, THAT THE SYRIAN ROLE IN LEBANON IS HELPFUL, NECESSARY AND EVEN WELCOME. WAS THIS IMPRESSION CORRECT? ASAD REPLIED YES, BUT THERE WERE STILL "GREAT COMPLEXITIES" CAUSED BY THE INTER-

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PLAY OF LEBANESE DOMESTIC ELEMENTS WITH OTHER ARAB STATES AS WELL AS WITH STATES OUTSIDE THE AREA. HE DODGED MY QUESTION AS TO WHICH ELEMENTS OR STATES WERE CAUSING THE GREATEST COMPLEXITY SAYING, "WE HAVE NOT BEEN ABLE TO DEFINE THE PROBLEMS SO PRECISELY." BUT, HE CONTINUED, IT IS CLEAR THAT WHILE THE LEBANESE PROBLEM CONCERNS STATES BOTH IN AND OUTSIDE THE MIDDLE EAST, IT IS SYRIA'S DESTINY TO BEAR THE BRUNT OF THE PROBLEMS. SYRIA HAS MADE MAJOR

SACRIFICES TO MAINTAIN ITS PRINCIPLED
STAND IN LEBANON AND IF DAMASCUS CANNOT GUARANTEE THE
RETURN OF STABILITY AND SECURITY TO LEBANON, NO ONE CAN DO
SO. ASAD ADDED GRIMACING, THAT "THIS DOES NOT MEAN WE
MUST DESTROY OUR OWN HOUSE IN ORDER TO SAVE LEBANON.
NOR MUST WE BEAR ALL THE SACRIFICES, ESPECIALLY
SINCE THE PROBLEMS OF LEBANON CAN BRING MORE HARM TO THE
LIVES OF OTHERS THAN TO SYRIA. THOSE OTHERS ARE
ACCEPTING NO RESPONSIBILITY; ON THE CONTRARY THEY ARE TAKING
NEGATIVE ATTITUDES AND CAUSING DIFFICULTIES."

6. SYRIA CONSIDERS THAT AMONG THE STATES VITALLY CONCERNED
WITH LEBANON THERE ARE SOME WHO ARE PLAYING A ROLE IN LEBANON
INCOMPATIBLE WITH THEIR OWN INTERESTS. AID IS COMING TO
PARTIES IN THE CONFLICT FROM CERTAIN ARAB STATES WHOSE
MOTIVATION FOR CONTINUING TO FURNISH SUCH AID IS INCOM-
PREHENSIBLE TO SYRIA. FINALLY BECOMING SPECIFIC, ASAD SAID HE
HAD THE PENINSULA STATES IN MIND. WHAT THEY WERE CURRENTLY DOING
WAS UNHELPFUL. DAMASCUS WAS HEARING NICE WORDS FROM THEM
BUT WAS WELL AWARE OF WHAT THE PENINSULA STATES WERE
ACTUALLY DOING. THEIR "CLOUDY AND OBSCURE ATTITUDES" WERE
NOT PRODUCING A GOOD RESULT. FURTHERMORE, THEY ARE CONTINUING
TO GIVE MATERIAL AID WHICH IS HELPING TO PROLONG THE FIGHTING.

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FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 9559

S E C R E T SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 6154

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FOR SECRETARY FROM MURPHY

7. I RECALLED I HAD SAID IN MY OPENING COMMENTS THAT
YOU WOULD APPRECIATE ANY SUGGESTIONS AS TO THE
POSITIONS WE MIGHT ADOPT IN OUR DIPLOMATIC ACTIVITIES. BY

HIS COMMENTS WAS HE IN FACT SUGGESTING WE DISCUSS THE SITUATION WITH THE LEADERS OF THE PENINSULA STATES? ASAD REPLIED, "LET ME THINK ABOUT THIS." PERHAPS HE WOULD HAVE KHADDAM DISCUSS THIS POINT FURTHER WITH ME OR EVEN "YOUR DEAR FRIEND" SHIHABI. I PICKED HIM UP ON THE LATTER POINT SAYING I KNEW THAT GENERAL SHIHABI WAS VERY BUSY BEING CHIEF OF STAFF BUT HAD IN FACT NOT BEEN ABLE TO SEE HIM FOR OVER THREE MONTHS. I WOULD GREATLY APPRECIATE A DETAILED EXPOSITION OF THE LEBANESE MILITARY/ SECURITY SITUATION AS SEEN BY SYRIA AND HOPED HE WOULD AUTHORIZE THE GENERAL TO PROVIDE SUCH TO ME. ASAD AT FIRST REPLIED THE MILITARY SITUATION WAS WELL ENOUGH KNOWN THROUGH MEDIA REPORTING BUT THEN RECONSIDERED AND SAID HE WOULD DIRECT THE GENERAL TO GIVE ME A BRIEFING. (COMMENT: I RAISED THIS QUESTION OF CONTACTS WITH SHIHABI BECAUSE I HAVE GOTTEN THE IMPRESSION IN RECENT WEEKS THAT THE GENERAL MIGHT HAVE BEEN TOLD TO HAVE NO CONTACT WITH ME.)

8. I NOTED THAT THIS WEEK SEEMED TO HAVE SET A NEW PATTERN OF POLITICAL CONTACTS WITH A PROCESSION OF LEBANESE LEADERS COMING FIRST TO DAMASCUS AND THEN CONTINUING ON TO CAIRO FOR CONSULTATIONS (KARAME, SAEB SALAAM, ETC.).

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DOES THIS NEW CONTACT WITH CAIRO PROMISE TO ADVANCE A PEACEFUL SETTLEMENT? ASAD REPLIED FIRMLY IN THE NEGATIVE. THE LEBANESE INVOLVED ARE GOING TO CAIRO IN RESPONSE TO EGYPTIAN INVITATIONS WHICH SYRIA HAS ENCOURAGED THEM TO ACCEPT. BUT THIS WILL NOT BRING SIGNIFICANT IMPROVEMENT TO THE SITUATION IN LEBANON. EGYPT HAS BEEN PLAYING A CONSISTENTLY NEGATIVE ROLE IN FURNISHING ARMS AND GIVING TRANSIT FACILITIES FOR THE ARMS AND FIGHTERS FROM OTHER ARAB COUNTRIES. CAIRO HAS ALSO PLAYED AN UNHELPFUL ROLE THROUGH ITS PRESS AND RADIO PROPAGANDA. I REMARKED THAT THE CONTACTS BETWEEN THE LEBANESE LEADERSHIP AND CAIRO MIGHT BRING ABOUT A BETTER UNDERSTANDING IN CAIRO OF SYRIAN POLICY. ASAD DID NOT RESPOND.

9. I CONCLUDED WITH POINTS THAT WE PREPARED TO BACK UP SARKIS WITH ALL APPROPRIATE MEASURES AND HOPE HE WILL BE A FORCE FOR UNITY AND POLITICAL ACCOMMODATION. MENTIONED WE WERE CONSIDERING MAKING A PUBLIC STATEMENT EDOUND THE TIME OF HIS INAUGURATION AND WOULD APPRECIATE ASAD'S SUGGESTIONS AS TO POSITIONS WE MIGHT FEATURE IN SUCH A STATEMENT. HE SAID HE WOULD GIVE THIS QUESTION ALSO FURTHER THOUGHT AND RELAY ANY IDEAS THROUGH KHADDAM.

10. OUR MEETING ENDED WITH ASAD ASKING ABOUT YOUR TRAVEL PLANS AND INTENTIONS IN SOUTHERN AFRICA. HE SENDS HIS

BEST WISHES FOR WHAT HE KNOWS WILL BE AN EXTREMELY DIFFICULT SET OF DISCUSSIONS. HE RUEFULLY COMMENTED THAT SOUTH AFRICAN PREMIER VORSTER MUST HAVE AT SOME TIME VISITED LEBANON AND SERVED AS POLITICAL ADVISOR TO CHAMOUN AND FRANGIE, JUDGING BY THE LATTERS' BEHAVIOUR.

11. COMMENT: CONSIDERING THE FLOOD OF VISITORS ASAD HAS BEEN RECEIVING OVER THE LAST SEVERAL DAYS AND THE FACT THAT WE ARE IN THE FINAL DAYS OF THE RAMADAN FAST, I CONSIDER THE EARLY RECEPTION HE GAVE ME UNDERLINES HIS INTEREST IN HEARING OUR VIEWS ON LEBANON. IT ALSO SUGGESTS THAT DESPITE THE GENERAL NATURE OF MOST OF HIS STATEMENTS, HE HAS TAKEN TO HEART MY COMMENT AT OUR AUGUST MEETING (WHICH KING HUSSEIN TOLD PICKERING HE WOULD BE MAKING AS WELL) THAT IT WOULD BE USEFUL FOR THE USG TO HAVE MORE FREQUENT DIRECT EXPOSURE TO ASAD'S OWN VIEWS.

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